



Good News Stories: The American Soldier At Work

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You wouldn't know it from most of the major media – but there are incredible stories to be told in Iraq and Afghanistan. Behind every one of those stories is an American soldier.

From providing medical care and rebuilding schools, to kicking soccer balls with kids or spending time with orphans, our troops are building new and better societies in Iraq and Afghanistan. The immediate and long term benefits for a more peaceful region and world are immeasurable.

Here are some of the individual efforts.

- **Farming:** More than 65 percent of Iraqis live off the land, on small farms connected by a network of dirt tracks and irrigated by canals and aqueducts that run for hundreds of miles.

The Army is helping Iraqis set-up their nation's first farm co-operative on "Saddam's farm" near where Hussein was captured in Balad. The Ministry of Agriculture used to operate the 400-acre farm but its produce benefited only Saddam Hussein and his family.

Maj. Randy Fritz, of the Army Reserve's 308th Civilian Affairs Brigade, from Homewood, Ill., serves as public health chief at the local humanitarian assistance coordination center. He says the goal is to create a collectively owned and managed farm so local farmers can get better prices for their produce.

They don't get good prices, he says, because they are competing with each other. The goal is to bring the produce to one place where it can be weighed, washed and then packed in boxes exported.

U.S. citizens have donated \$20,000 worth of seeds, which are being distributed throughout the district, he added.

The co-op will serve an area running from Taji in the south to Samara in the north, which is home to 1 million people and 150,000 farm families.

The area should also see construction of the region's first supermarket, a gas station and a slaughterhouse for processing meat.

- **Schools:** More than 250 students and teachers welcomed Soldiers at the grand opening of the Al-Walid elementary school in Baghdad recently.

The opening is the result of several months of work by Soldiers from the 4th Battalion, 1st Field Artillery Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, and the 490th Civil Affairs Battalion, an Army Reserve unit from Abilene, Texas.

The children clapped and sang as Lt. Col. Richard Bowyer, cut the shiny, red ribbon to reopen the refurbished school building.

Surveying the structure's months ago, Bowyer said he knew major repairs were going to be necessary to make the building ready for students. The roof leaked, windows were shattered and the bathrooms were broken and all the doors were missing

Bowyer met a charitable organization in the U.S. that had been looking for a project to assist in the reconstruction of Iraq and he recommended the school.

The Al-Walid school is one of 55 schools located within the 4-1 FA area of operations. Nearly every school in the area has an ongoing project or is scheduled to be renovated by the artillerymen and civil affairs personnel in the near future.

Fixing the schools is a big part of our responsibility because these children will eventually become the future of Iraq.

- **Operation Soccer Ball:** You can see the future of Iraq through the eyes of its children.

The most recent project for the 501st Forward Support Battalion, headquartered in Germany, was giving away 150 soccer balls to local kids in Baghdad.

Soccer is huge in Iraq. People play everywhere from nice fields to streets to vacant lots. On a day with good weather, you can see people all over Baghdad kicking soccer balls.

Unfortunately, the poorer children in Iraq do not have soccer balls or have very old used balls. The battalion put together a convoy of four vehicles and 11 soldiers to visit two neighborhoods near their operations base.

The children were thrilled to receive new soccer balls as soldiers tossed the balls to the boys and girls. The joy of watching all the kids running around was evident in the faces of many of the soldiers.

Like many other instances, this was a win-win situation for us. The Iraqis appreciated receiving soccer balls and the soldiers felt good about contributing to the community.

- **Operation Helping Hands:** Soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division have been working to not only make Iraq secure, but have also been putting time and effort into helping towns and villages with their "Operation Helping Hands" program.

With "Operation Helping Hands," soldiers donate their own money to help provide families with food and healthcare necessities. Brigade commander, Col. Ben Hodges, came up with the idea of helping the poor families in the area.

Each unit takes the money they collect and puts it into the district that they are working in. Down to the unit level, the soldiers get to go out into the community to see where their money is helping. They have collected several thousand dollars – which goes a long way toward helping many Iraqi families.

- **Medical Care:** Soldiers are often out in Iraqi communities to provide medical care and humanitarian assistance.

A small, impoverished village about 10 miles from Baghdad was recently paid a visit by personnel from the Medical Civic Action Program. The program sends doctors and medics out to provide free medical care on a regular basis.

There was a concern because this village, in the past, had not been necessarily friendly. But they were very happy to see the soldiers of the 447th Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron.

Because of conditions under Saddam Hussein, soldiers are treating diseases we rarely see here at home, such as tuberculosis, hepatitis and polio.

Our troops also teach basic prevention and provide Iraqis with hygiene packets filled with items donated by servicemembers. The packets included toothpaste, soap, lip balm, baby wipes, diapers, formula and hand sanitizer.

- **Women's Rights:** For the first time in history, women in Mosul, Iraq, were able to join the rest of the world in celebrating International Women's Day. The day recognizes coordinated efforts of women everywhere for equal rights and political and economic equality.

Herro Mustafa, the CPA's coordinator for Ninevah Province, said "Today, we are celebrating the story of Iraqi women – for all the past, current and future work they have done to build a new Iraq."

The People's Assembly building was rededicated as the Center for Iraqi Women. The center will serve as a meeting place for all women of Iraq, where they can share ideas, offer training, coordinate communication and build a safer homeland.

- **Police Stations:** In Mosul, Iraqi police say they are grateful to soldiers from the U.S. Army's 503rd Military Police Battalion for their assistance in rebuilding police stations. Coalition forces helped renovate several police stations and enabled the Iraqi police officers to protect their fellow citizens.

In the past year, 4,570 police, corrections specialists and firefighters from the Ninevah Province have completed the training. They are better prepared to maintain security for the people of Iraq because of the training the coalition forces provided.

- **Coalition Forces Have Won the Iraqi's Hearts and Minds:** On January 5, high-level Baath Party members denounced the violence in Iraq and are cooperating with efforts to stabilize the country. A member of Saddam Hussein's former political party said he's confident that by helping coalition forces, Iraqis will see swift and sure changes to the years of poverty and hardship many in the country have endured.
- **Iraq's Security Forces Continue to Grow:** Iraqi security forces continue to take huge steps along with the political process. Less than a year ago, the Department of Border Enforcement was created,

consisting of the border police, immigration inspections and civil customs inspections sections. Today, there are more than 82,000 border policemen and nearly 9,000 border enforcement agents operating across a 3,600-kilometer border.

Coalition forces are actively involved in border security operations. In addition to conducting joint patrols with the Iraqi border police, coalition forces routinely visit border posts and continue to train and mentor the Iraqi border patrol officers.

More than 11,000 experienced policemen who have completed the transition integration program where they have learned democratic principles and values, basic fundamentals of policing, policies and standards for conduct, law and order, and their responsibilities to their communities.

There are more than 1,600 policemen who have trained from scratch in an eight-week training program. In early March, 450 additional policemen graduated from the first class of the eight-week Baghdad Public Safety Academy. Another 1,500 new policemen will graduate in April. Two academies are expected to have more than 2,100 new professional policemen by the end of 2004.

The new Iraqi Army is growing. In early March, more than 1,000 recruits of the 4th Battalion graduated from the nine-week basic training program.

- **Free Press:** Twelve Iraqis recently graduated from the first Iraqi Basic Public Affairs Course, taught by the Coalition Press Information Center. Officials said the students are part of the Iraqi Media Engagement Team and vital to spreading the word about coalition efforts in Iraq to the public.

The course was created from scratch and structured after the U.S. military public affairs course. It was modified to get away from an American focus and toward an Iraqi focus. The result is a dozen people who are paving the way for a direct exchange of information between the future government of Iraq and its people.

These are amazing stories. There are hundreds, perhaps thousands more. I am proud of our soldiers and want to say “thanks.”